

Testimony for Public Hearing
An Act Concerning Paid Family and Medical Leave
Senate Bill 221
March 8, 2015

My name is Bonnie L. Hennig and I have been a resident of Connecticut since 1990. I am the director of an outpatient psychiatric clinic catering to people who have a genetic illness. I support the need for the Paid Family and Medical Leave Act.

Everyday I work with families who struggle to make the decision to put food on the table versus catering to the needs of their loved ones who are ill. Many of these families are supported by the passage of FMLA but continue to face hardships because of the intermittent need to take unpaid time off to attend to loved ones who need them. One example is a woman who was assured her job would be secure however realized quickly that when she needed to accompany her sick loved one to a doctor visit or spend an extra hour or two with them, she was not paid for this time. As time went on, she cancelled many of the doctor visits and needed to rely on Medicaid to cover as much homecare as possible. Her loved one became worse and eventually she needed to contact 911 to bring him to the hospital. Even then, her loved one travel scared and alone to the emergency room and continued to be alone until she finished work. In the long run, the state wound up paying more for the patient to be transferred to the hospital and spend time as an inpatient until he was stable enough to return home. The woman felt guilty about not being available to prevent the hospitalization but knew her bills were piling up and that she would have no way to catch up paying these in the future if she took time off. Looking back, a paid family leave would have allowed her the few hours each month to bring her loved one to his check ups. In addition, if he needed extra help once in a while for a few hours in the morning before she left for work, she would be able to provide the loving care he needed.

Another example is a patient himself who is now employed. While the patient was not employed, he received general assistance. The amount he received was not a great deal of money but he did qualify for many programs that also provided help. Even with the state assistance however, he barely "got by". While he was unemployed, he was able to use medical transportation to come in for check ups. His disease was stable and he was able to function quite well. He desperately wanted to return to work however and found a job. Initially he was doing well but needed to cut back medical appointments since he was not paid to take time off from work. When he began to work, he was no longer eligible for many of the programs that provided him with assistance. He needed to work longer and harder to get to the income level he needed to survive. When the stress became too great, he began to have more difficulty at work. This situation was exacerbated by the fact that he was not able to return to the clinic for follow up appointments during work hours. As with many illnesses, when people are not able to follow up with their care, then tend to progress. I'm sorry to say this gentleman who tried to do the right thing, tried to work and feel like a normal person, fell apart. We are in the process of trying to put him back together but this surely means that he will go back on general assistance and require more help from the state.

The families I work with are not looking to take advantage of a paid family leave program. Many of them are loyal and thankful to the companies they work for. Many companies try to be helpful with the FMLA paperwork, but it is not enough. Families and patients are suffering due to the choices working families members are forced to make. In the long run, the state, who is covering many of the healthcare costs for these patients, is actually paying more. By setting up a program where employees contribute wages to the program, stakeholders including both employees and employers, will benefit by the ability to take paid leave and show the longevity and loyalty a paid family and medical leave program can foster respectively.

It is imperative that the Paid Family and Medical Leave Act bill is passed for the patients and families of Connecticut. These patients and family members work so hard to balance the need to make ends meet and show loyalty to the companies they work for. Allowing for paid leave will provide them with the relief they need to care for themselves and family members who rely on them.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

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Doctoral Candidate